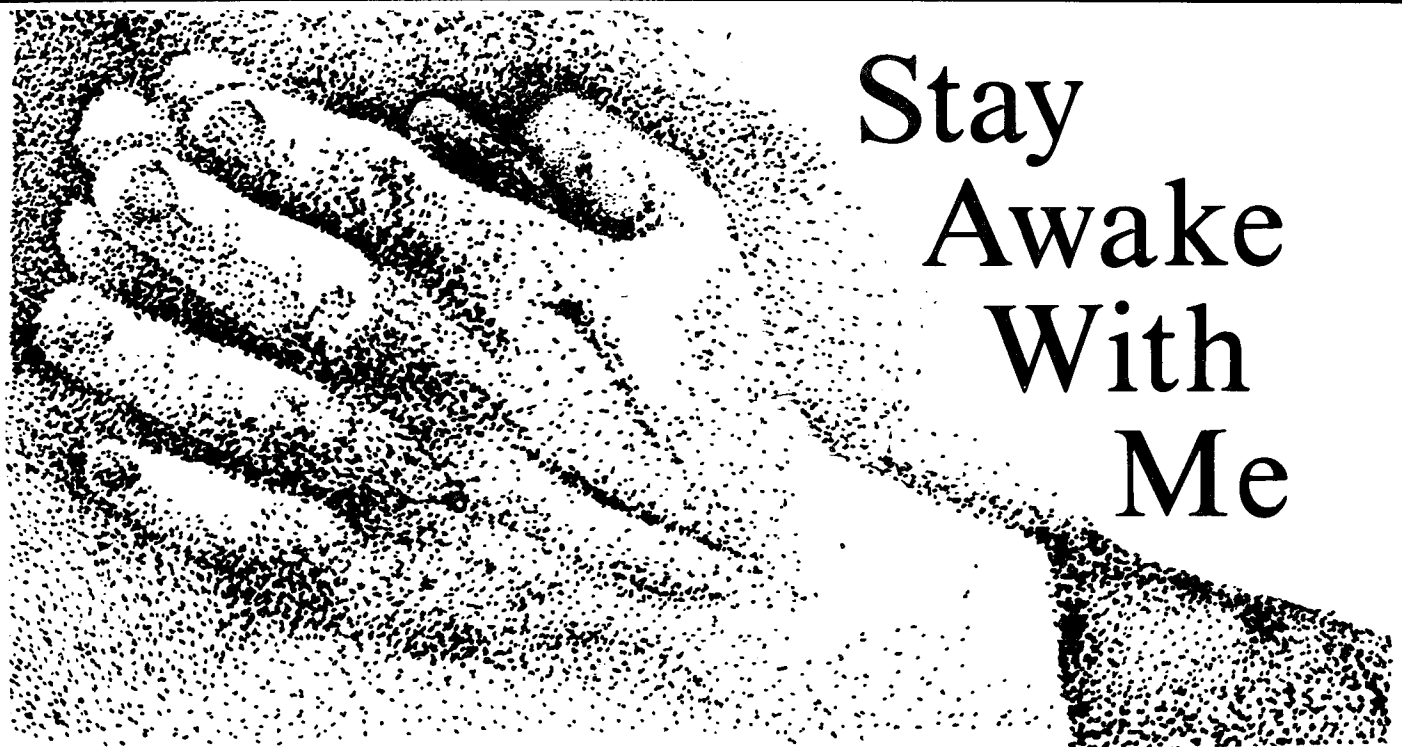


MANNA *in The wilderness*

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Stay Awake With Me

By Julia Occhiogrosso

There was a lot of panic in Phil's eyes as he hurried to the coffee line. We had known Phil for a while. He lived in a little rundown apartment across the street from where we served. This particular morning he had a desperate quiver in his voice as he began to explain. "They are knocking down the apartments. I'm being evicted. I have a week to move." At 71 years old, Phil had lived in those rooms for a number of years. And while it was in the poor part of town, it was his home. "I don't know where I can go," he sighed.

The sudden disruption would be difficult to manage for one even in the most stable of circumstances. Indeed for Phil, who received a low fixed income, who had no family to call upon, and who had been recently diagnosed with terminal lung cancer, this eviction was a terrible burden. As grace avails, we had room for Phil at the Catholic Worker house. He came to stay with us until his death three days before Christmas this year.

In the months to follow we were to witness the gradual displacement of others like Phil. They were moved from their meager abodes and homeless encampments. In their poverty they fell prey to the steady, determined efforts of a demolition contractor and the official powers behind the scene.

During these winter months it was not uncommon for me to find myself standing among my homeless brothers and sisters warming our hands around a fire in perfect view of the wrecking theatrics. Eyes would be cast in silent stares as bulldozers plowed through empty buildings and homes. Walls, windows and doors collapsed and crumbled into heaps of debris. One day as I watched the dust rise from the rubble, I recalled the statements made by the business men and city developers responsible for the clearing. "We are cleaning up a blighted area. This development will be good for the city's economy."

My gaze shifted back to the fire as a sting of unease came over me. The poor with whom I stood had no value to those set on the success of this business venture. The city developer or president of the company did not know any of the poor by name. They were just

part of that "blighted" area—an economic obstacle that needed to be cleared.

How easily we embrace what is profoundly evil. The burden of unchallenged myths and assumptions weigh heavily, causing us to stumble and sway from the path of truth. Our intuitive moral sensibilities have been silenced for so long that it is difficult for us to even trust that they exist. Instead we place our total trust in the world's gospel, the rational realities. What is rational and objective is automatically accepted as true.

With sound economic planning and efficient techniques we can reign victorious over all social ills, while spiritual tools of faith, hope, and love are not taken too seriously. They can never match the effectiveness of the rational means. Yet, as we grow more technically and rationally proficient, it is at the expense of our spiritual and mystical selves. And in our spiritual impotence we are unable to confront the powers and principalities in naming what is evil or proclaiming the Good News.

The evils of the world weave in and out of our lives like a serpent. We worship the sly, slippery maneuvers of successful entrepreneurs. We stand in wonder and awe at the versatile contortions of new technologies. We bow our heads and honor anyone who can effectively rattle the sacred charms of progress. It is often the most educated and affluent, liberal and conservative alike, who find comfort in these seductions. Even those among us who have a sense of this evil crawling in our midst, find themselves searching in the dark for something that is effectively camouflaged. The serpent blends well into the backdrop of shiny, new products and upwardly mobile lifestyles.

One of Jesus' last warnings to His apostles before His death was to help them avoid the traps of the world. In Mark 13:37 He challenges, "What I say to you, I say to all, stay awake." Later in the garden at Gethsemane, this theme is repeated as He questions the disciples, "Do you not even have the strength to stay awake with me?"

It is important to note that as Jesus approaches the ultimate manifestation of evil in His day, the crucifixion, He wants His followers to keep alert and know the

forces of evil that are near. We too are challenged to keep awake and to be able to name the evil in our midst.

This is no easy task given the constant tension of being "in the world, but not of it." Our Gospel, unlike the world's, is centered on the person of Jesus. We are sustained by our faith in our God as the source of all Being. We are encouraged by a hope in eternal life. We trust in God's love as the true transforming power. In contrast to the world's gospel, we are unable to grasp these mysteries rationally. We cannot control them nor make them effective. They move in us as much as we surrender to them. There may be an intuitive moment in prayer when we catch a glimpse of ourselves mingling with God's essence. Or our hearts might be stirred by the authentic human encounter of feeding someone who is hungry. In all of this is the message of Good News which the world has rejected, and the Christian must reclaim.

In the Last Judgment Jesus calls upon us to serve Him by serving "the least of these." Only in this way would we be made ready to enter the Kingdom. It was as though Jesus knew that the poor would always be despised, ill-treated and unwanted by the world. Yet He also seemed to know that standing with the least of these, the least invested in the myths of the dominant culture, would alter our world view.

By responding to Jesus' concrete invitation to serve the poor: to feed the hungry, to give drink to the thirsty, to open our home to a stranger, our understanding of the world's values would be turned upside down. The poor, like Phil, would become a part of our lives and we would be changed. Jesus seemed to know that if we could allow our hearts to be broken in a

compassionate encounter with those considered to be the least, the Holy Spirit would move freely, eyes would be opened. Indeed, we would be able to name what is evil and proclaim the Good News.

L.V.C.W. SCHEDULE

Monday - Saturday, 6:30 a.m. - 7:30 a.m.

Serve breakfast at E and Washington St. (new location).

Wednesdays, 5:00 - 7:30 p.m.

Dinner Meal at St. James the Apostle Catholic Church, 821 N. "H" St.

Thursdays, 4:00 - 5:00 p.m.

Prayer vigil in front of the DOE building.

Fridays (twice a month), 5:30 p.m.

Mass and potluck dinner to follow at St. John the Baptist House, 500 W. Van Buren.

BETTER AND BETTER OFF

The world would be better off
if people tried to become better.
And people would become better
if they stopped trying to become better off.
For when everybody tries to become better off,
nobody is better off.
But when everybody tries to become better
everybody is better off.
Everybody would be rich
if nobody tried to become richer.
And nobody would be poor
if everybody tried to be poorest.
And everybody would be what he ought to be
if everybody tried to be
what he wants the other fellow to be.

—Peter Maurin

"Desert Demons and Daily Life"

***August Desert Witness VI
Commemorating Hiroshima-Nagasaki
August 3-6, 1990***

Genie and Bill Durland, Resource Persons

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WE ARE NOT TAX-EXEMPT

All gifts to the Catholic Worker go to a common fund which is used to meet the daily expenses of our work.

Gifts to our work are not tax-deductible. As a community, we have never sought tax-exempt status since we are convinced that justice and the works of mercy should be acts of conscience which come at a personal sacrifice, without governmental approval, regulation or reward. We believe it would be a misuse of our limited resources of time and personnel (as well as a violation of our understanding of the meaning of community) to create the organizational structure required, and to maintain the paperwork necessary for obtaining tax-deductible status. Also, since much of what we do might be considered "political," in the sense that we strive to question, challenge and confront our present society and many of its structures and values, some would deem us technically ineligible for tax-deductible, charitable status.

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